DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 364 CG 028 320

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TITLE	Gender Orientation and Career Maturation among Rural Elementary School Students.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	30p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Awareness; Childhood Attitudes; Children; Females; *Grade 6; Intermediate Grades; Males; Middle Schools; Rural Schools; *Rural Youth; *Sex Differences; *Sex Stereotypes; Socialization
IDENTIFIERS	Gender Issues; Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

The attitudes and beliefs regarding gender, achievement and self-concept of sixth-grade students from a rural Kansas elementary school were assessed. Research consistently demonstrates females' superior verbal ability over males and males' stronger quantitative skills when compared to females. Explores the development of these differences in rural communities, a brief review of gender and career development research as it applies to middle school children is offered here. The study addresses five questions: (1) are gender concerns implicated in perceived career options among rural youth?; (2) are levels of gender stereotyping different for males and females in current rural public school settings?; (3) is this background a disadvantage to students regarding their ongoing career development?; (4) can these differences be detected in elementary school students?; and (5) are current strategies widening career options for rural youth, males and females, in public schools? An experimental six week career unit was presented and compared to the approved curriculum in career education for sixth grade. Results demonstrate that career education materials significantly influence the non-traditional perceptions of sixth graders; meaningful changes in beliefs for gender and self-concept may require more comprehensive educational approaches. Further analysis underscores the multidimensional character of human development. Personal adaptation was limited due to masculine valuations by all students, including females, in this strongly traditional environment. Implications for career counseling are discussed. (Contains 38 references.) (EMK)

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* Gender Orientation and Career Maturation Among Rural Elementary School Students

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GENDER ORIENTATION AND CAREER MATURATION AMONG RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

Conventional belief systems often overgeneralize differences between males and females, especially among youth and children. However, research consistently indicates females seem to demonstrate more verbal ability than males, and males present stronger quantitative skills than females. Also, there are differences in perception and physical characteristics that are demonstrated. Evidence regarding gender differentiation of most other characteristics is conflicted, and usually contains large areas of overlap (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Romer, 1980). For example, while males may generally be stronger in math skills than females, there are a substantial number of females with better math skills than many men. Also, while females may have elevated verbal skills in comparison to males, there are a substantial number of males who do better verbally than many females.

Much of the work on the effects of gender socialization reflect limiting features for women regarding their career development. Presumably, success in life is an outcome of learning to be women, just as male success is largely predicated on how they learn to be men. Male socialization is heavily weighted toward instrumental qualities, i.e., challenge and risk management, and independence and creativity (Romer, 1989). In this regard, male adjustment is more likely based on needs of the labor market while for women, it is based more on learnings regarding conventionality

or passivity, and acceptance and non-competition (Romer, 1980). This assumes that these more expressive qualities emphasize relational support with fewer applications to present or future work roles. In other words, the effect of socialization on young women is likely to be disadvantageous on the job but important to family nurturance. For men and women, the adaptive outcome may be counterproductive to men in relationships (Carlson, Napier & Pogobrin, 1990).

The traditional model for family role organization was at one time believed to be remarkably tenacious (Kanter, 1977), and there is growing concern about the self-limiting features of this conventional model on career development and decisions throughout the lifespan, but especially among the youth (Cook, 1993). One comparison of adolescent females with males determined that vocational goals are set at a diminished level for women, and this occurs as a socio-cultural phenomenon throughout American society (Izzo, 1973). In other words, the culture of work benefits by rewarding the compression of abilities differentially. Further, its continuation is assured by organizing stereotyping of individuals and job characteristics (Weinrach, 1984). For example, media, peer associations and public schools facilitate this demand in a purposive manner (Richmond, 1983).

Genderized differences may be partially understood as an artifact of socio-economic status, especially when compressed by financial hardship (Cafazzo & Gross, 1989), and the influence of rigid (standard) parenting strategies (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). To

the degree this occurs, personal needs to actively express abilities are likely undermined. In some ways, the result of engendered socialization on adults may be estimated to partially prepare them to engage in a global socio-economic environment or exercise their full capability within relationships. In this regard, gender attitudes may provide a means to limit work ethic and life perspective. A very powerful transmitter of traditional values for high school girls is the family (Roe, 1984; Smith, 1980). At a time when the global economy stimulates the need for flexibility and the capability for lifelong learning (Riverin-Simard, 1990), many families, particularly in rural communities, are more likely to ascribe to a traditional and conventional model. Often, it seems to be a reaction to modernization. For example, in a Pennsylvania study, nearly 6,000 middle school students demonstrated the influence of the same-sex parent to be nearly as significant as career education resources in their career planning. They tended to emphasize traditional employment modes for male and female students. In this project, movement from the traditional gender-typed occupations represented a substantial challenge for these rural ninth graders (McKenna & Ferrero, 1994).

Increasingly, by the time a youth is in high school, the effects of conventional family influences is apparent in career choice (Smith, 1980). The need for approval from family while implementing self-limiting career planning strategies were evident when the career status and decisions of sixty-four high school females, mothers and grandmothers were compared (Weeks, Wise, &

Duncan, 1984). In this study, most females felt they were non-traditional when they took a part-time job.

There are some indications gender orientation is associated with self-esteem as early as the middle school years. In their study of middle adolescents, Cate & Sugawara (1986) found masculine competencies more highly valued by participants. Within this sample, self-esteem was diminished among the females. This was explained as an outcome of the emphasis placed on the masculine model in defining what participants socially value. Physical maturation was, also, implicated. Among other things, this indicates the importance of gender to personal qualities and identity, i.e. self-concept (Fitz, 1972). Therefore, patriarchal definition and value are ascribed to by male and female children. For female students, it provides negative value on personal attributes, and if there is not significant support, personal confidence and valuations are vulnerable.

In fact, self-esteem is implicated in a number of at-risk elements (Gross & Capuzzi, 1989), including family interactions (Palmo & Palmo, 1989), well-being (McWhirter & McWhirter, 1989), and capability (Meggert, 1989). Diminished levels of self-esteem can be expected to influence career decisions in important ways. In fact, inadequate preparation may limit the personal strivings to the degree children are vulnerable in social adaptation. In a study of career development and family dynamics among 24 elementary children (fourth through sixth grade), half of the children believed they already made important career choices and many

indicated they were becoming committed to a conventional lifestyle regarding marriage and family (Seligman, Weinstock & Heflin, 1991). This indicates they were clear about their career choice and likely received parental, peer and school approval for it. In fact, there is evidence these choices may be illusory. In other words, the feedback these children received is not likely to fit the demands from the world of work. It is more likely they will be dependent on others for life affirmations, believe stereotyping is acceptable, and lack significant job satisfaction (Holder & Anderson, 1989).

The identity of the sixth grader may be expected to benefit by the discovery of personal capability. In a project involving 140 seventh grade students representing below-average, average and above average achievement groups, males demonstrated a more internal valuation style and females were more external. These findings illustrate the importance of internal investments and the diminished effect of external attributions to identity development, i.e., learned helplessness was pronounced among female learners (Robison-Awana, P., Kehle, T. & Jensen, W. , 1986).

Later development in young adults, may hinge on knowing that one can do at least one thing well (Erikson, 1968). The tenacity of traditional gender beliefs and the limiting effects in career decisions for women was demonstrated in a study of 128 white, urban, females graduate students from a midwestern university (Found & Kammer, 1989). In this university population, a multi-dimensional approach was necessary in order to widen career

horizons. Even among elementary children, career learning exercises alone are not likely to elevate self-esteem dramatically or contribute meaningfully to gender socialization. Other areas heightened in middle adolescence and useful for personal exploration and development, include abilities necessary to accomplish difficult tasks, skills to work in groups, willingness to take risks, and autonomous problem-solving (Havighurst, 1952). This indicates there a several skills associated with personal preparation for life. He indicates the need for students to be multidimensional in their approach to career choice and this preparation has implications for development generally. In a study of sixty-one English middle school students, career decisions were made in the context of relationships perceived as extremely value-laden. Female learners were more likely to choose relationally than males (Janman, 1989). Therefore, if career choices are presented in a relational context, students at the middle school levels are capable of responding contextually. In other words, these female youth believe and are believed, prepared to respond to current career dilemmas. They are preparing to discount their career needs, and heighten the vocational priority of another.

This background in gender and career development research indicates a number of questions which require clarification: 1) Are gender concerns implicated in perceived career options among rural youth? 2) Are levels of gender stereo-typing different for males and females in current rural public school settings? 3) Is this background a disadvantage to students regarding their ongoing

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career development? 4) Can these differences be detected in elementary school students? and 5) Are current strategies widening career options for rural youth, males and females, in public schools?

In summary, career development theorists emphasize the importance of role socialization (Super, 1984), the power of stereotyping (Weinrach, 1984), and the influence of family relationships (Roe, 1984) in career choice. Schools, and to some degree families, accept their responsibility for contributing in important ways to the career and relational decisions of children and youth. Despite the importance of career choice and an emphasis on the well being of children, there is not likely to be a comprehensive effort to provide career resources and support to students in a timely fashion. Females and the disadvantaged were usually victims of inadequate preparation for the world of work (Ginzberg, 1984). Traditional methods of career education are expected to produce only minimal departures from traditional career decision modes. Historically, this is usually destructive to women. Despite good intentions of teachers, counselors and administrators, this research will demonstrate the trend continues.

METHODS

Sample

The control group consisted of sixth grade students from a small school in east central Kansas. There were twenty-three girls and thirteen boys in the pretest group. At the time of the

posttest administration there were fifteen girls and twelve boys. Attrition, then, was minimal. The treatment group consisted of sixth grade students from a small southwest Kansas school. In both the pretest and posttest groups there were ten girls and sixteen boys. In the treatment group, there was no attrition.

Treatment included a six week unit in career education. This material included activities requiring students to research, write letters, interview, play games, and participate in career shadowing. The career unit was presented during the months of March and April of 1993, and two months was allowed between the pretest and posttest. The treatment group experienced about thirty minutes of teaching time on a daily schedule. the control group experienced a traditional learning experience approved by the local school district.

Instruments

The instrument used to assess gender career beliefs was developed by Brogan, D. & Kutner, N., (1976). The Sex-Role Orientation Scale (SOS) is a 36 item questionnaire requiring the respondent to agree or disagree. A second instrument was used to assess gender orientation. The Children's Sex-Role Test (CST) was developed by S. Moore (1985). The CST contains words connoting masculine, feminine or neither beliefs. The child responds with always, usually, sometimes or never as the word most closely describes their self-perception. The CST is scored using a similar method to the BEM Sex-Role Inventory. The reliability of this instrument was obtained by using 74 girls and boys in grades 4-6.

The split-half and test-retest reliability coefficients were .86 and test/retest .79 and above (Moore, 1985).

The third instrument involved in this project was the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) developed by Harter (1985). It assesses personal qualities as the child perceives them in six areas: Scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth.

Analysis

As much as possible, data was collected under standardized conditions. In other words, students were assessed in the same year and were in the same grade. As much as possible, they were exposed to relevant material for students in the sixth grade. The teachers in the effected classrooms were different personally and in style. The teacher in the treatment group is considered a master teacher.

After tabulation of data, differences were assessed using ANOVA analysis. Each group was compared to determine the differences from treatment, gender orientation, career stereotyping and self-perception regarding achievement, social skills, physical ability, attractiveness, self worth or character.

RESULTS

The attitudes and beliefs regarding gender, achievement and self-concept of fifty-one sixth-grade students from a rural Kansas elementary school were assessed. Twenty-six male and 25 female students were included in the study. Eleven cases were excluded from several steps of analysis because of incomplete responses, and they were not always the same people. The data were coded and entered into the SPSS Package, Manova function for post hoc analysis. This involved an examination of males and females by treatment and control group regarding within and between group comparisons.

These post hoc findings indicate a significant ($p = .05$) difference within the pre-and-post test groups for masculinity. However, the differences were not accounted for by group assignment (control x treatment). In addition, the differences within participants for traditionality between the pre- and post-test groups was significant ($p < .05$). Finally, there was a significant difference for the pre-test and post-test scores between groups ($< .10$) for Scholastic Competence ($< .01$). No other test or group findings were significant.

Put Table I About Here

Therefore, there is a significant difference in assessed masculinity scores of sixth-grade students (Table I). The mean of the control group is lower than the mean for the entire pre- and post-test groups. The treatment group is higher than the overall mean at post-test, as well and there is very little change. Therefore, there were increases ir masculinity scores for both groups regardless of their career education classroom experience. In fact, the increase within the control group was substantial compared to the treatment group. Therefore, career education materials seem to make a difference in valuation of masculinity.

Put Table II About Here

The traditionality scores for the control group were higher than the mean at pre- and lower than the mean at post-test assessment (Table II). The mean score of the treatment group was lower than the mean at pre-test but higher than the mean at post test. There was some decline in traditionality for the control group. The overall mean for traditionality increased from pre- to post-test. Therefore, there is some change for traditionality generally in the sixth grade, but those receiving career educa-

tion materials and support change the most, and the difference is significant. Therefore, career education materials make a significant difference in the non-traditional perception of sixth graders.

Put Table III About Here

The Scholastic Competence scores for the sixth graders were overall higher at post-test than at pre-test (Table III). The control group scores were higher than the mean at pre-test and substantially below the mean of the control group, and just above the mean and the control group mean at post-test. In other words, the treatment group was below the mean at pre-test and above the mean at post-test. The change between groups was substantial and significant, and the treatment group increased the most. Therefore, a classroom experience may account for this change, although it is not likely explained by this analysis.

There is some reason, then, to analyze this data further. For example, it is puzzling that there is not a significant difference between treatment and control groups on other variables utilized in this research. One possibility is that the

theoretical construction of the study design was flawed. In other words, gender may not be as influential in career decisions as supposed, although this is not likely.

Also, it may be that the curriculum for both treatment and control groups was more consistent than assumed, and this is more likely. At this point, it seems reasonable to conclude that attitudes and beliefs among female and male sixth grade students, particularly around gender orientation and associated self-concept variables are remarkably consistent. This exercise elicited little meaningful change regarding gender orientation, even though there was substantial modeling of female strength for the treatment group by a master teacher and a recent graduate of a Counselor Education Program. The teacher for the control group did not have the same professional status and was not completed with the post graduate training.

Finally, there is dramatic increase within the Scholastic Competence scores for the treatment group. It may be that the career education materials and support, while not gender specific during the assessment, made a large impact on the achievement motivation of the students. If our theoretical perspective is accurate, this is likely to have had the greatest impact on the female students.

Last, it is probable that the influence of home and peer relationships is quite powerful at this level for elementary school students, especially for masculine valuation. In other words, the socialization within small, rural communities is

likely traditional in that sanctions for differentiation are direct and immediate. It is not likely that sixth graders have the personal integrity to distinguish themselves in controversial ways even though such behavior may be more accurate indication(s) of their personal needs. Meaningful change of attitudes and beliefs for gender and self-concept, therefore, are likely to require more comprehensive educational approaches for sixth grade students to continue to increase flexibility in their career decisions.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate, by the substantial covariance among variables, the multidimensionality characteristic of human development. Also, an appreciation can be gained for the complexity involved while providing intervention, specifically large group counseling, for many topics in counseling. It is tempting to believe that developmental content when presented, learned and evaluated will produce meaningful change in students. In this instance which is described, the information was presented to the students in a straight-forward and appealing manner. The classroom teacher has an outstanding reputation and is a Master Teacher. Yet, personal adaptation was very limited due to masculine valuations by all students, including females. This means the horizons of the female students were broadened in the direction of traditional male qualities rather than female. There are indications of the importance of feminist collaborations, collective bargaining partnerships, and marital enrichment.

Limited personal adaptations occur even though most people are likely to be exposed to material indicating the degree of importance associated with the qualities of flexibility, self-esteem, and mastery to economic and social success. Apparently, the conventional world views which is reinforced provides blinders, as well. This means that submission is likely ascribed to by elementary school female students when assertiveness is necessary. Elementary students, generally, seem more likely

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rigid in thinking when adaptability has more potential. Therefore, achievement may be more easily the province of male students since those qualities are more likely supported by their peers, family and school personnel. It follows that female students are likely vulnerable to preconditions for helplessness when mastery is essential. A feminist presence in rural communities has the benefit of providing consistent messages about exploitation of women.

This project was designed to tap a multidimensional quality in a population known for great ambiguity, if not confusion. It was intended to assess physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development among elementary school students about to venture into middle school, a transitional time. This project demonstrates that a master teacher and developmentally appropriate career education material are inadequate for fundamental career choices. A message regarding organized efforts to support collective actions and agendas may elevate the role of teaching and empower other workers in the community.

Developmentally, puberty may not be well understood. There is no precise point at which puberty begins, nor is there agreement on the rationale for this individuation. Most agree it is composed of brain, pituitary and hormonal activity. Provided there is adequate nutrition, a variety of physical changes occur (Noshpitz, 1991). However, identity development is achieved within the physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual domains. This research serves as a reminder that the rate and

features for socialization are distinguished by gender (Beiser, 1991) as much as anything else. Therefore, young women (and men) are exposed to a great deal of socialization in preparation for, adapting to, and as follow-up to menarche. Assimilation of these experiences is multidimensional, and provides the foundation for adult decisions. Comprehensive programs are complex in their support of child and youthful development (Rye & sparks, 1991) and difficult to create and establish (Gysbers & Henderson, 1989)in rural communities. However, a promising may lie in implementing a career component in a school with multicultural demands (Norton, 1997)

In this setting, meaningful career development is best discussed early in the elementary years. Also, it may be important to consider including content which many assume is sex education. In this way, children and youth can be exposed to activity which encourages them to support the best qualities of each gender without regard to specific characteristics. In other words, both little boys and girls can learn about their special qualities and ways to validate each other.

Professional Counselors are directly involved in providing guidance to parents about teaching children the special qualities of femaleness and maleness using developmental terms. Parents can play important roles in affirming this teaching while emphasizing their own value and orientations, including those who view gender and sexual activity as sacred. In this and other ways, the esteem associated with gender and sexual activity has an

opportunity to reflect the depth and diversity within communities by introducing gender differences, diversity which most communi ties have experience with. Also, parents themselves, may be exposed to the language utilized to affirm gender.

O'Neil and Egan (1992) describe positive implications for traditional role belief transitions, particularly regarding development. They outline five (5) phases of the gender-role journey which are likely ongoing processes. They are: Phase I - Acceptance of traditional gender roles; Phase 2 - Ambivalence about gender roles; Phase 3 - Anger; Phase 4 - Activism; and Phase 5 - Celebration and integration of gender roles. Rural communities, perhaps communities generally, are seriously challenged by world view limitations. For example, the medical model often restricts intervention because it often types people as inadequate in some way. Also, management of anger is encouraged rather than explored for developmental potential. Further, the use of gender studies materials for some part of a parenting class exposes larger segments of the community to alternatives and possibilities. This has the potential to provide a basis for widening perspectives regarding diversity in people utilizing familiar lifestyle issues. There are implications, as well, for marital relations and pre-marital choices.

People in Phase I may be ascribing to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and endorsing a restrictive view of gender roles. They seem to believe strength, control, power and restricted emotionality are important male qualities. They value

warmth, expressiveness, nurturance, and passivity among women. They may be naive about the restrictions produced by gender roles on human potential, and how sexism restricts and violates many people. Generally, they experience anger when others violate gender-role stereotypes (O'Neil & Egan, 1992). Therefore, support groups which provide opportunities for children and youth to explore their feelings about being male and female under changing circumstances, and provide a means to become aware of alternative perspectives among adult facilitators. Small groups provide a vehicle for acceptance of a variety of emotions normalization of personal complexity. Group participation provides experience in working with others which addresses an expectation of future employers.

The career development issues for women seem to fall into eight (8) categories: Job-search skills, occupational information, self-concept clarification, strategies and role models for managing dual roles - homemaker and worker, assertiveness training, information on a variety of working environments, lifestyle clarification, and development toward a value of independence (Zunker, 1994). Many of the skills associated with these transitions involves healing and recovery from early socialization regarding gender, family and relationship roles for some students. Women, then, while often experiencing a wider exposure to western culture, also identity diffusion, role strain, and emotional turmoil (McWilliams, 1992) as common concerns. For some, adolescence is anchored in learning workable solutions to

personal challenges in achievement and patterns and methods for internalizing empowerment experiences in the world of work (Nadelson, 1990). The Professional Counselor may have opportunities to work with parents' career development and healing while addressing the needs of children. The resources of many single parents may be significantly supplemented in this way.

As men and women attempt to balance conflicting demands between work and family with personal needs distinguished by gender, relationships and nurturance for children seem to be challenged in several ways, including power differentials, distribution of household tasks, energy and time dispersal, skills of extending family resources, methods of exposing parenting concerns, learning about leisure activities, advancement and mobility. Also, social demands, and spousal competition for dual career families can be explored. Traditional families seem vulnerable to disagreements regarding gender expectations, i.e., the husbands investment in parenting, whether the wife is employed, expenditures and personal autonomy, vulnerability of wives following the emancipation of children, overinvolvement in work, risk of social isolation, and preparatory crises in the event of divorce or death (Holder & Anderson, 1989). Professional Counselors, then, may consult and collaborate with other professional helpers to address the issues within these themes. Especially in rural communities, this is likely to be a minister. Together, they can provide marital enrichment activities and

program to facilitate healing within existing relationships relatively free from needless controversy.

In summary, a comprehensive counseling program is likely to contain elements of large group presentation, small group support, and opportunities for personal growth development. It may include opportunities for advocacy and teaming with parents in diverse ways. By collaborating with other professionals in the community, students are exposed to helping professionals developmentally rather than when something is wrong. In these ways, communities are more likely to address the complexity of most current career decisions of youth. The evidence in this project indicates that the continued use of the traditional counselor role in schools is not sufficient to address fundamental career and developmental needs of female and male students. Indeed, continued allegiance to this model may contribute to at-risk qualities of youth and family vulnerability.

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TABLE II

TRADITIONALITY

Pre-Test	M	s.d.
Control Group	30.654	4.345
Treatment Group	27.680	6.524
All	29.196	5.668
Post-Test		
Control Group	29.692	6.608
Treatment Group	30.040	5.488
All	29.863	6.027

Within Subjects (1,49 d.f.)

	SS	MS	F	Signif.
Cells	561.36	11.46		
Test	12.46	12.46	1.09	.302
Group x Test	70.31	70.31	6.14	.017

TABLE III

SCHOLASTIC COMPETENCE

Pre-Test	M	s.d.
Control Group	2.830	.605
Treatment Group	2.568	.793
All	2.684	.720
Post-Test		
Control Group	2.910	.679
Treatment Group	2.964	.663
All	2.940	.663

Within Subjects (1,43 d.f.)

	SS	MS	F	Signif.
Cells	7.78	.18		
Test	1.26	1.26	6.96	.012
Group x Test	.56	.55	3.07	.087

TABLE IV

CAREER UNIT CURRICULUM

Work Definitions

Decision Making

Interest Inventory

Individual career needs assessment survey

Employment: Looking, applying, and interviewing for a job

Career games for participation

Worksheets for career issues

Career Shadowing project

Community speakers and career videos

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